



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
March 15th, 2011**

I. Call to Order & Introductions: Bill Gray, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Bill asked for all present to stand for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged in and to remain standing for the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Approval of Minutes: Bill Gray, Chair, edited the February Meeting Summary Minutes to reflect the correct book title "*Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*" and that the Veterans Benefits Information Fair is to be held at the Elks Lodge in Rockville. Jackie Ogg, Commissioner, amended the minutes to note that "approximately 70% of veterans leave their jobs within the first year and 80% of veterans drop out of school the first year". Mike Subin, Commissioner, made a motion to approve the February Meeting Summary Minutes as amended. Rich Fales, Commissioner, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the February Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved with the edits. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Bills Impacting Veterans in the Maryland General Assembly – Rich Fales, Commissioner

Rich Fales reported on the following bills currently in the Maryland General Assembly:

- [House Bill 735 – Gaming – Slot Machines – Ownership and Operation by Eligible War Veterans' Organizations](#): Making applicable statewide the provisions that authorize eligible veterans' organizations to own or operate slot machines; and altering the definition of "eligible organization" to make it applicable to specified war veterans' organizations. These organizations would be required to donate at least one-half of the proceeds from its slot machines for the benefit of a recognized charity with the remainder of the proceeds from its slot machines to further the purposes of the eligible organization.
- [House Bill 774 - Income Tax - Military Retirement Income](#): Increasing the maximum amount for a subtraction modification under the State income tax for military retirement income from \$5,000 to \$10,000 of military retirement income received; providing for a delayed effective date; and applying the Act to taxable years beginning after December 31, 2012. Rich noted that half the states in the U.S. do not tax military retirement at all. This bill will have an impact considering the amount of military that are moving into Maryland because of BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure).

Carl Bedell, Commissioner, previously sent an e-mail to Commissioners regarding a recently passed budget amendment by the U.S. House of Representative that imposes a seven-month moratorium on all legal fees paid under the Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA). The EAJA reimburses attorneys who represent Veterans on a pro bono basis. It allows the Veterans, many who could not otherwise afford an attorney, to have legal representation in the appeals process at the US Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, the Federal Circuit Court, and the Supreme Court.

EAJA does not reimburse attorneys for representing a Veteran at the Department of Veterans Affairs. If this budget amendment is passed, attorney representation of Veterans at the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims will likely severely decline and Veterans will be left to face the Federal Court System on their own or pay for an attorney out-of-pocket – both will effectively limit the access to the courts for low-income Veterans.

Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison, noted that she forwarded this information to the County's Office of Intergovernmental Relations (OIR). Commissioners are encouraged to send Betsy information regarding other laws at the federal level so she may inform OIR of legislative issues.

Sharon Hodge, Commissioner, indicated that the Federal Government is seeking to cut funding to many Veterans related programs.

IV. Update on Veterans Collaborative, Rich Schiffauer, Commissioner

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) developed by the Washington DC VA Medical Center that would provide tele-mental health services at the County's Piccard Drive Crisis Center location is currently being reviewed by the Department of Health & Human Services. Once the edits are made, the MOU will be sent back to the DC VA Medical Center for final review and signature.

nVideoConferences is hosting another [Military Extravaganza](#) on Tuesday, May 3rd at the University of Maryland College Park. The event will feature a hiring fair, VA services and benefits information and enrollment, seminars, and kiddy barracks. Approximately 4,000 military service members and veterans have attended these events in the past. Free transportation will be available at local military installations including Quantico, Andrews Air Force Base and Ft. Meade. CVA can reserve a booth if Commissioners are available to provide representation. Jerry Godwin, Vice Chair, offered to attend and disseminate information about the Commission and other County agencies.

V. Chair and Vice Chair Report – Bill Gray and Jerry Godwin

On March 3rd, Bill Gray went to Annapolis with Norm Taylor, President, Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) Maryland Chapter, Harvey Kaplan, President, MOAA Montgomery County Chapter, and Jim Campbell, Member, MOAA Montgomery County Chapter, to meet with State representatives. Harvey presented information concerning the needs of Veterans in Montgomery County, including the installation of a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). Harvey remarked that Veterans consider it unfair that \$1.3B of Maryland's resources are being spent on undocumented alien services and with limited resources being spent on Veterans. Rich Schiffauer, Commissioner, noted that he has done some research regarding CBOC's and it is a very laborious application process that requires years of planning. Rich suggested that the Commission appoint a Committee to work on this issue.

On February 16th, Bill gave a presentation at the MOAA's monthly luncheon. Bill discussed the goals and accomplishments of the CVA.

Bill received a letter from Congressman Chris Van Hollen stating that he has sent another letter this year to the Honorable Shaun Donovan, Secretary, U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, and Eric Shinseki, Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs, requesting a minimum of 25 Section 8 permanent housing vouchers for homeless veterans be allocated to the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) to be distributed under the Veterans Assistance Supportive Housing (VASH) program.

VI. March 30 Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans (WHVV) Second Annual Reunion – Jane McCarthy, Commissioner

Betsy has sent a notice out to her Veterans Information and Resources eSubscription list, which has over 300 individuals signed up. The Office of Public Information has published a [press release](#). A notice has also been published in the Senior Beacon and on the Gazette's online calendar of events.

Susan Kirk, Commissioner, was able to solicit a donation from Whole Foods to provide light refreshments at the reception/reunion, which will be held in the atrium from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Susan will continue to seek donations for dessert. A panel discussion will follow at 7:00 p.m. featuring four to five panelists. The Great Hall will be set up with round tables and will be able to seat 64 individuals. The panelists will sit in an informal setting to encourage an authentic experience.

Bill will begin the program and Mike Subin, Commissioner, will introduce the VIP guests. The panel discussion is scheduled for approximately one hour. County Executive Isiah Leggett is scheduled to recount his 2009 visit back to Vietnam. Bill will give closing remarks. Sharon will ask Bernard Edelman, Panelist and Author of *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam* to speak about his visit back to Vietnam if Leggett is unable to attend.

There will be six tables set up in the atrium for exhibitors including the Mental Health Association (MHA), Easter Seals, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), an Army History Table, Lt. Colonel H. Hunter Holliday III with the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration, and Disabled Veterans of America (DAV) Chapter 12. Two tables will feature photographs. VVA will be working the registration table and Michael Higgs, Commander, DAV Chapter 12, will handle the VIP guests. Bernard will be showcasing some of his photographs in the display cases at the Silver Spring Civic Building for the WHVV event.

It was suggested that music from that era be played in the atrium area during the reception. Sharon Hodge, Commissioner, volunteered to be in charge of this.

J. Mauri Hamilton, Commissioner, will draft a survey to be given out to participants after the event. Comments can be used to design next year's program.

Bill recently contacted Michael Walsh, Vietnam Veteran, who lives in Germantown and was featured in the Washington Post article "[Back to Vietnam, State by State](#)" last year. Mr. Walsh is honoring his fellow veterans by visiting Vietnam memorials in all 50 states. Details of his travels can be found at www.MichaelFWalsh.blogspot.com. Mr. Walsh is planning to attend the WHVV event.

VII. Process for Accepting Donations to the Commission – Bill Gray, Rich Schiffauer, Commissioner, and Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison

Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison, has developed a database for keeping tracking of all items either donated or loaned. Receipts will be given to individuals who donate items, which will include an agreed upon value of the donation. The County Executive's Office must be notified of any and all gifts/donations, which may be in the form of equipment, supplies, professional, technical or clerical services, transportation, materials, or money.

Rich Schiffauer, Commissioner, is working with his contacts at Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL) to create displays for Memorial Day. Families of fallen service members from

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) have loaned items that can be used in the displays.

VIII. Unfinished Business

None.

IX. New Business

Jackie Ogg, Commissioner, gave a presentation to the Commission on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Advisory Council about the CVA's top issues. She shared statistics regarding the number of veterans and service members in Montgomery County. Over 50,000 veterans live in Montgomery County that have served in any war and there are 4,000 military service members that have ever served or are currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. She discussed the importance of identifying veterans and military service members during intake. Many mental health and substance abuse providers and programs are already asking this question. VA enrollment is expedited for veterans seeking mental health services. There are unique eligibility characteristics for Guard and Reservists, which make up the majority of Veterans and service members in Montgomery County.

X. Announcements

Betsy reminded Commissioners of the VA Aid & Attendance Program that provides Veterans and their spouses or surviving spouses up to \$22,000 per year to pay for help at home, an assisted living facility, nursing home, or other senior housing. She recently met a man who passed on a questionnaire developed by [Mission Veteran Assistance](#) (MVA) that applicants can use to expedite the application process. MVA is a local organization dedicated to helping Veterans and Widows of Veterans with their Long Term Care Expenses by qualifying for the VA's Aid and Attendance Program.

The Social Security Administration also has [Special Extra Earnings for Military Service](#). Special extra earnings credits are granted for periods of active duty or active duty for training. Special extra earnings credits are not granted for inactive duty training. If your active military service occurred from 1957 through 1967, they will add the extra credits to your record when you apply for Social Security benefits. If your active military service occurred from 1968 through 2001, you do not need to do anything to receive these extra credits. The credits were automatically added to your record.

Roland Kauffman, Commissioner, attended the VVA State Council Meeting last weekend. The Maryland Veterans Commission is seeking new Commissioners. The Commission meets every 3 months. Applications will be accepted until October.

[Frank Woodruff Buckles](#), the last known American World War I Veteran was laid to rest March 15th with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery.

Jim Campbell, MOAA, announced that Phil Alperson, Montgomery County BRAC Coordinator, will be speaking at MOAA's monthly luncheon on Wednesday, March 16th at Manor Country Club. Congresswoman Donna Edwards is scheduled to speak on April 13th. If you are interested in attending, please e-mail Jim to reserve a seat: jim@jrcampbelljr.name.

Jim noted that a [Veterans Treatment Court](#) has been developed in Philadelphia, PA. The court will service Southwestern Pennsylvania, which is home to more than 300,000 veterans. Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Seamus McCaffery, who is also a retired Colonel in the U.S. Air Force Reserve, is presiding over the treatment court.

Michael Higgs, Commander, DAV Chapter 12, announced that DAV Chapter 12 will be sponsoring a [Veterans Benefits Information Fair](#) on Saturday, May 21st, 2011 at the BPOE Elks Lodge 15 in Rockville, MD. The DAV is reaching out to Veterans as some benefits information has changed, including new diseases associated with Agent Orange that Korean War veterans may now be eligible for. Representatives from Federal and State Departments of Veterans Affairs and Veterans Service Organizations will be present to assist determining veterans eligibility and filing for benefits regarding employment, education, disability compensation, health and nutrition, and other Federal and State Veterans Programs. The VA is providing eight workers and the DAV is providing three National Service Officers. If your agency or organization is interested in having a table at the Fair, please contact Michael at 301-424-2065 or email michaelhiggs@comcast.net. Betsy will e-mail the flyer to the Veterans Information and Resources eSubscription list and Carly Clem, Staff Support, will post the flyer on the Montgomery County Veterans Affairs website and on the CVA Facebook page. It was suggested that the flyer be posted at National Guard Unit offices.

Adjournment: 7:30 p.m.

Next Full Commission Meeting:

Tuesday, April 19th, 2011, from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at 401 Hungerford Drive, Rockville in the 1st Floor Tan Conference Room.

Respectively submitted:

Carly Clem, OSC

Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison